

# BEN WILKINS



## Press kit

milagro  
RECORDS



## Ben Wilkins: 70s piano pop flashback

May 7th, 2012 by Connie Bernardi

*"Besides being incredibly musically inclined, he has a set of pipes on him that may just blow you out of the water."* – **ThisBonusTrack**

*"The amount of polish he brings to intricately arranged piano jams is impressive."* – **Herohill**



Montreal's Ben Wilkins is in town performing on Wednesday night in support of his self-titled debut album. Ben's music is a piano-driven pop sound that flashes back to the sounds of the early 70s (*think Elton John, Burt Bacharach and Billy Joel vibe*). He's soaked up that era and it's rhythm, textures and grooves and skillfully turned into something uniquely his own (*OK maybe there's a slight comparison to Ben Folds...just a little*).

His lyrics are slightly quirky and that mixed in with a familiar pop piano sound...his is a music that draws you in and just makes you feel good. And happy.

If you qualify yourself as a music lover of any kind, you'll want to check him out.

Ben was born and raised in Ontario and then moved to Montreal to study music at McGill and has composed string arrangements for several artists including Bran Van 3000 and Misstress Barbara.

**Ben Wilkins - Wednesday, May 9th @ Zaphod's - 8pm, \$7**

*Connie Bernardi plays the role of radio announcer on Majic 100 in Ottawa, full time music blogger and seeker of new music.*



May 06 2012

We hear it from our elders all the time, but it never really sticks: “Stay in school.”



But this credo stuck with **Ben Wilkins**, and provided influence for what was one of the most remarkable debut albums of 2011. His self-titled full-length utilizes his vast array of influences and experience, creating a timeless and incredibly flushed-out debut that brings to mind the ‘70’s, a time when grand and orchestrated pop music was celebrated.

“What inspires me about that era is the way music was produced,” says Wilkins. “There was something special about the grooves, the distinctive sounds of the recordings and the entire band playing live in the studio. We tried to achieve the same natural atmosphere while recording; I wanted the songs to breathe.”

And breathe they do. Wilkins’ unique combination of piano-driven pop, soulful rhythms and grand orchestration produces songs that grow with every listen. 'Soup For One' begins as a simple ballad but takes flight into a melodic ode to a lost love.

'Back Of My Head' rises and falls, showcasing not only Wilkins emotional side but his ability to command a full-blown orchestra with a groovy, sensible ease. And 'The Road Is Long' is a delicate, harmonious slice of piano pop that would not have sounded out of place on some of John Lennon’s finer solo works.

Simply put, Ben Wilkins is an album that will surely appeal to a wide variety of music lovers; a direct result of Wilkins as a genuine music lover himself whose time studying has given him a unique appreciation and understanding of music.

Born and raised in Ontario, Wilkins moved to Montreal to study music at McGill University. He majored in Classical Trumpet and soaked up as much composition, arranging, singing, theory and jazz harmony as possible, spending countless nights sneaking into the piano studios after hours to write songs. Upon graduation, he received a scholarship to study Mandarin in China, and spent the better part of a year at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Beijing Language and Culture University.

Wilkins was approached by acclaimed engineer Pascal Shefteshy (Sarah McLachlan, Rufus Wainwright) to record an album and you can hear the fruitful results of two artists working towards one goal: an ageless and enduring classic pop record.

Wilkins is a busy man in his own right. James Di Salvio entrusted him with writing the string and brass arrangements on The Garden, Bran Van 3000's fourth album. Wilkins also did vocal and string arrangements on 2010 Juno nominee Misstress Barbara's new album.

Ben Wilkins is an uplifting listen, providing optimistic sounds that are as delightful as they are engaging.

**Ben Wilkins**

Thursday, May 10/12, The Casbah  
8pm, \$10

## **Ben Wilkins Takes His Love for Music on the Road**



Image credit: Pascal Shefteshy

By Shaelyn Corwin - Maple Ridge Secondary, Maple Ridge BC

### **London, Ontario singer-songwriter Ben Wilkins releases debut album.**

Music has always been a constant in Ben Wilkins' life. He spent weekends as a kid listening to local bands in his hometown of London, Ontario, moved to Montreal at the age of 18 to study music at McGill University and is now turning his passion for music into what he hopes will be a successful career. Having already released a self-titled debut album, it's safe to say Wilkins has taken a big step towards turning his dream into a reality. *Youthink* caught up with Wilkins to chat about his new album, his appreciation for music from the '70s and his plans for 2012.

**YT: Who or what inspired your passion for music and how excited were you to go to Montreal to study music at McGill?**

**BW:** It was very exciting. [Music] became sort of a focus in my last year of high school - that's why I really wanted to do that and I really wanted to get in. I had other choices and such but that was really where I wanted to be. So I was really thrilled to get in. It was an exciting move.

**YT: What were some of the core lessons and skills you developed while at McGill that have helped you become the artist you are today?**

**BW:** I learned that the program was not going to in itself make me a musician. It really had no focus – not even a seminar about songwriting. For example, it was really specifically classical jazz, or pretty abstract composition. At around third year, I decided there's a lot of stuff at this school I can still learn. I started getting sound recording classes, not because I wanted to be an engineer, but because I knew it was really

important to be able to talk to engineers. I definitely learned a lot about music theory - I'm able to arrange for orchestral instruments on the level that I can right now.

**YT: What are your hopes and expectations for your self-titled debut album?**

**BW:** This album was already winning the lottery that I got to record it. It was made completely independently. The album itself deserves a chance in that I wanted to make sure there was proper promotion behind it. I didn't want to just put it out on the Internet and see what happens. I've seen that happen with friends where if it's not in the right hands when it comes out, it can be easily forgotten about or ignored. My hopes are that it just spreads across a large enough radius and people who like it pay attention. I just want people that will love it to hear it.

**YT: How would you describe the album and is there one theme that is consistent throughout?**

**BW:** The songs are very personal. And I did that consciously. I wanted to write songs that were true to me. The first album is a collection of songs I've written over a couple of years so there's not one underlying theme. Each song has a theme.

**YT: The album has a '70s feel to it. What is it about that era's music that appeals to you?**

**BW:** Music from that time is actually pretty romantic stuff. It's always been an exciting part of music history and American history in general. I've heard this a lot and its fun because I'm being compared to people that I love and from an era that I love. But we weren't trying to make the record actually sound like it's from the '70s. We were just using techniques of recording that was used more in the '70s.

**YT: What do you think is missing in the music industry today that was present in that era?**

**BW:** I think there are some things that have happened in the music industry in the last 15-20 years. One of them people refers to as "the loudness war" where everybody is trying to get their single to be the loudest one, because record companies and record labels decided that they would sell more records if the songs were louder. What that has done is destroy the dynamic feeling in music. You can't have really loud moments and really quiet moments if everything is really loud all the time. It's becoming to the point where people really notice now and are complaining about it.

**YT: Where do you find it easiest to write and where do you draw inspiration?**

**BW:** I wish I had a really easy formula because I probably would be writing a lot more. I find I write often when I am able to isolate myself at the piano for long enough or the guitar... but I need to be in a place where I feel pretty good. Then songs will start to write themselves. I can't elaborate too much because it works or it doesn't work. It's true or it's not true. I try to no overthink.

**YT: What are your plans and goals for 2012?**

**BW:** My plans and goals are to play a lot of shows, to take this show on the road. And that's a pretty fun thing to do because when I bring a real piano to every show, that's a challenge in itself.





## SWEET 16 - The BEST Albums of 2011

*We've compiled a list of Icon Fetch's Sweet Sixteen - The Best Albums of 2011. These are the discs that spent the most time jammed into our car stereo and in heavy rotation on our iPod over the last 12 months. Each album includes a link to a full Icon Fetch review. Plus, we've also added links to each album so you can preview them at Amazon.*



**Over the Rhine - The Long Surrender (Great Speckled Dog)** Hands down a stunning release, hauntingly beautiful. Excellent production by Joe Henry. Gets better with every listen. [Read the review.](#) [Preview the album on Amazon](#)



**Smithereens - 2011 (E1 Entertainment)** Our vote for "comeback of the year" - the 'reens return with their first new original studio album in 12 years. There's a youthful energy to these tracks. [Read the review.](#) [Preview the album on Amazon.](#)



**Davina & the Vagabonds - Black Cloud (Roustabout)** A fun listen - nothing like a blazing horn section to cheer you up. We're expecting more big things from leader Davina in the future. [Read the review.](#) [Preview the album on Amazon](#)



**Ben Wilkins - self titled (Milagro)** A late addition to the list, Wilkins is a young Canadian songwriter, but somehow he's able to channel pop and soul from the early Seventies. Not a bad tune on this one. [Read the review.](#) [Preview the album on Amazon.](#)



**Gregg Allman - Low Country Blues (Rounder)** We've been waiting for Gregg to make a great solo album like this. Sure helps he's got T-Bone Burnett as producer and the searing guitar of Doyle Bramhall III. [Read the review.](#) [Preview the album on Amazon](#)

Plus 11 more...



By Tony Peters

December 2011

## Ben Wilkins - self titled (Milagro) review

BEN WILKINS



The most melodic album of the year comes from a young songwriter from Canada. Ben Wilkins' self-titled debut is full of memorable hooks and echoes of the past. His excellent piano work and pleasant vocals recall a time when singer/songwriters dominated the charts of the early Seventies. But, what truly makes this album a throwback is Wilkins choice of recording technique – choosing to utilize a real string section, horns and background vocals. This, intertwined with his keen melodic sense, make for an album that sounds incredibly fresh amongst all the digital sampling of today.

For a guy who obviously experienced the decade secondhand, Wilkins shows an uncanny ability to meld the pop and soul influences of the 1970's into something original. Take "Soup For One," which begins with just voice and piano (reminiscent of something Todd Rundgren might've written back in the day), then increases in tempo and morphs into a disco-infused chorus, complete with a string arrangement which is absolute ear candy. "Caught in the Rain" begins with a bouncy, Pepper-era Beatles riff before giving way to an acapella section that sounds like Earth Wind & Fire. "Allison," with its breezy melody and ukulele, hides its darker subject matter. The album's first single, "Through to You," with its funky beat, strings and horns, has an almost reggae feel to it. "Back of My Head" is another standout with great background vocals. There really isn't a bad song here, with every single track having a memorable hook.

The sound quality of the album is phenomenal. Because it was recorded "old school", to fully enjoy all the nuances of the lush arrangements, do yourself a favor and actually grab the CD – the difference between it and a compressed version in mp3 is remarkable. Credit for the great sound goes in part to happenstance, where Wilkins was given unlimited access to a big recording studio, while the producer was out of town. The care that went into the record is definitely noticeable.

At present, this excellent debut is only available in import form, and as an mp3 download on Amazon and iTunes. Here's hoping Wilkins can catch on with a US label, and we can get more great songs from this up-and-coming talent. -- Tony Peters



# The Gazette

## What's on your playlist?: Ben Wilkins

By BERNARD PERUSSE, The Gazette

December 19, 2011



### Ben Wilkins

Ben Wilkins plays the kind of musically literate piano pop that's becoming all too rare on the musical landscape these days. Fans of Harry Nilsson, Steely Dan and Ben Folds should seek out the Montreal-based musician's debut disc, released in October. Its highly inventive sense of songcraft and arrangement, with smart orchestration and well-placed background vocals as sweeteners, make Wilkins an artist to watch in 2012.

While we wait for the next local gig, here's a taste of what the singer-songwriter has been listening to lately:

1. **24-25** Kings of Convenience
2. **Ex-Factor** Lauryn Hill
3. **Why** Carly Simon
4. **Sylvie Matthews'** Southern Comfort
5. **Party (featuring Andre 3000)** Beyoncé
6. **A Brand New Me** Aretha Franklin
7. **The Back Seat of My Car** Paul and Linda McCartney
8. **Rough Times** Candi Staton
9. **Live Again** Irma Thomas
10. **I Can See the Sun in Late December** Roberta Flack

*Ben Wilkins's self-titled debut album is available now.*



## Ben Wilkins- Soup For One

17 December 2011

By teepoo



Born and raised in Ontario the now Montreal based singer-songwriter Ben Wilkins shows both his classical and jazz training in his songs. I've heard a ton of guitarist singer-songwriters lately but here's a pianist. That doesn't mean his songs aren't lush though. *Soup For One* starts off as a lovely ballad with bass, piano and Ben's lovely voice. It slowly grows to include things such as strings and other voices. Looks like it became more than just *Soup For One* eh? Lame pun, I know.

Ben Wilkins- Soup For One



By Tony Peters

December 15th, 2011

## Ben Wilkins (interview)



You'd never think a young singer/songwriter could make such a classic-sounding album. Ben Wilkins hails from Canada and has just released his self-titled debut album, a combination of his melodic piano work and soaring tenor, augmented by strings, horns and lush background vocals - all adding up to a record that sounds like it could've come out in 1973. Wilkins has a knack for writing hook-laden songs that integrate vibrant pop with soulful R&B with a sprinkling of jazz. Icon Fetch talks to the up and coming talent about the circumstances that led to having literally unlimited recording time in a top-notch studio, where his influences come from, and the making of the clever video for his song "Through To You."

Live interview here: <http://www.iconfetch.com/great-music-interviews/2011-shows/451-ben-wilkins-interview.html>

# (cult)ture

## magazine

### Is Ben Wilkins the next piano pop star?

Written by Renée Rietveld

Monday, 12 December 2011

As an up and coming singer-songwriter, one would think being compared to the likes of Rufus Wainwright would be just a little bit intimidating. But, as Montreal-based Ben Wilkins has proven on his self-titled debut album, maybe all it takes to live up to this comparison is some real talent and a solid understanding of the classics.



Wilkins grew up in London, Ont., but left at the age of 18 to study classical trumpet at McGill University. After graduating, he also lived in China, spending time at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and then the Beijing Language and Culture University.

But something about the indie-rock capital of Canada still beckoned to him, and he ended up back there in 2008, where he was given the opportunity of a lifetime from producer Pascal Shefteshy. Shefteshy, an acclaimed engineer and producer working for famous producer Pierre Marchand (Sarah McLachlan, Rufus Wainwright), approached him to record an album and, with the blessing of Marchand, gave him free reign to make an uncompromising debut.

What resulted is a solid, catchy disc, featuring 24 musicians (everything from strings, brass, winds, orchestral percussion, to a small choir). It sounds like something a lot less modern and a lot more retro -- call it 'optimistic piano pop' with a twist.

The album is very strong, as evident by songs like "Back of My Head," a mixed instrumental track that laments a former lover's sharp words. This track would almost be better suited for the beginning of the album, as it sets up what is clearly Wilkins' style: songs that start with soft piano and light lyrics, eventually blowing up the sound into a frenetic mix of catchy drums, violins, and all other manner of instruments.

This album is, however, even stronger at the points when Wilkins veers away from his comfort zone a little. A good example of this divergence is "The Other Side," which sticks to a slower pace and is probably his most effective attempt at something different. His strength (despite the classical trumpet training) is clearly piano, and this song strips it down beautifully.

But really, Wilkins seems to be going for fun and light more than anything here, and in this he certainly succeeds throughout. He may be tackling some traditionally unhappy subjects, but you'd never know it given how perky they sound. His lyrics are also very conversational, sounding more like coffee date conversations than standard rhyming lyrics.

The standout track here is also very clear. "Through to You" (which was also given a really fun accompanying music video done in time-lapse) is where he really gets creative and goes a bit wild, throwing every instrument at the listener, and letting you go along for the ride.

Then there's "Soup for One" which is pure 70s pop, and "Opening" which sounds exactly like Ben Folds -- in fact, by the time Wilkins gets around to singing about being a "Chameleon," it would be hard to disagree with him. The artist comparisons that he has gotten are also undeniable here with songs and a voice that really mix the styles of everyone from Wainwright and Ben Folds to Jamiroquai and Kings of Convenience.

Wilkins is the kind of pop singer that we need more of nowadays -- unassuming, not overly cocky, mature. This is no doubt the reason he has no trouble keeping himself busy with other projects, like working with Bran Van 3000's James Di Salvio, who entrusted him with writing the string and brass arrangements on *The Garden*, the band's fourth album. He also did vocal and string arrangements on 2010 Juno nominee Misstress Barbara's upcoming album.

It's clear that Ben Wilkins is both passionate and talented, a standard combo that is seriously enhanced by his love of classical music. His optimism is also undeniably infectious. If this debut is any indication, he could be poised for a very interesting career.

**Track picks:** "Back of My Head," "Through to You," "The Fall," "The Other Side"





## Ben Wilkins

Posted by I.R.I.S. Entertainment on 2011/12/11

This week I've got a guest review for your enjoyment. Here's Colin's review of Ben Wilkins' self-titled debut album:

Within just a few seconds of listening to *Back Of My Head*, I was reminded of another Ben very near and dear to me. I'm sure I'm not the only one who would find the lilting quality of Wilkins' voice during the piano/vocal-only sections reminiscent of Ben Folds, and in a very good way.

At full instrumental strength, the songs throw me back to the big band sounds of the 70s... as if I'm back in that time, except, the lyrics are much more down to earth and appealing. It's nice to hear this kind of music with emotional and thought-provoking lyrics, rather than the often inane/insipid subject matter of the songs of that era.

All that said, it's difficult to put Wilkins' in just one category. Jazz, pop, blues, light rock, are all peppered throughout. But still, the album itself flows as a cohesive whole, due to some genius composition. The music is instantly appealing to the pop easy-listener (*Chameleon*), but still melodically and temporally interesting enough to hold the attention of someone who likes a bit more variation in a tune (*Opening*).

Wilkins' in-depth musical education and experience shines through very strongly, making it difficult to believe this is only his first studio album. Not to mention the song design, the playful back and forth of piano and full orchestra, and the strategic implantation of pauses and tempo changes. Wilkins' shows a wide breadth of musical talent that makes this album quite engaging.





## CD Review: Ben Wilkins S/T

Posted on December 6, 2011 by Aaron Kupferberg

BEN WILKINS



Ontario-born Ben Wilkins was already a well-rounded musician, having studied classical music at Montreal's McGill University and spent his post grad studies in Shanghai, China, when he began working with musical producers Pascal Shefteshy and Pierre Marchand (Sarah McLachlan, Rufus Wainwright) to put together his debut album.

The warm classical pop sound permeates most of this album, but the disjointed "Opening" has a mix of indie jazz percussive effects, piano and classical strings contrasting Ben's clean vocals. It sounds like he has thrown everything but the kitchen sink into the mix to let us know he's avant garde.

But what comes next is nothing short of a revelation. "Soup for One" is a perfect amalgam of Ben Folds and George Michael, with a simple piano chord that grows into a lushly orchestrated melody. The arrangement and vocals here are pitch perfect and draw you into his world. "Through to You" leans more to the sound of Ben Folds or Adrian Whitehead, with slick harmonies and clean horns.

Next comes the beautiful arrangement of "The Fall," full of minor chords and Pet Sounds styled orchestration. "The Back of My Head" adds a bit of Stevie Wonder styled funk to the melody, but at over four minutes, it drags on too long. A few tracks are guilty of trotting out a melody and having it overstay its welcome, including "The Road Is Long".

However, it isn't long before you get the crown jewel of the album, "Allison." It starts with a sweet, bouncy melody and ukulele and leads to a gorgeous middle eight. An impressive song that will linger with you, but Ben doesn't belt out the main melody here, instead it feels like he's holding back a bit.

The album ends on the gentle, multi-tracked harmonies of "Waltz to the Other Side." Despite the minor shortcomings, this album is a complex mix of classical pop influences that is sure to impress any audiophile and music fan. I expect much more from Mr. Wilkins, as he has the potential to be the next pop superstar.



## Ben Wilkins “Ben Wilkins”

Written on December 7, 2011 by [powerpopaholic](#) in [Highly Recommended by Powerpopaholic](#), [Power Pop Review](#)



### Ben Wilkins “Ben Wilkins”

Ontario-born Ben Wilkins was already a well-rounded musician, having studied classical music at Montreal’s McGill University and spent his post grad studies in Shanghai, China, when he began working with musical producers Pascal Shefteshy and Pierre Marchand (Sarah McLachlan, Rufus Wainwright) to put together his debut album. The warm classical pop sound permeates most of this album, but the disjointed “Opening” has a mix of indie jazz percussive effects, piano and classical strings contrasting Ben’s clean vocals. It sounds like he has thrown everything but the kitchen sink into the mix to let us know he’s avant garde.

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But trust me on this, several songs have found a permanent home on my ipod – a stunning debut!

# McGill News ALUMNI MAGAZINE

December 5th, 2011

## Recommended listening – Fall-Winter 2011

### Soundcheck



Ben Wilkins, BMus'06

Ben Wilkins might soon grow weary of receiving so many comparisons to Ben Folds, but he is earning them for all the right reasons— his clear tenor voice, his delicately crafted, piano-driven songs, his clever bittersweet lyrics. Burt Bacharach is another name that comes up when considering Wilkins, and that's no accident. Wilkins has a soft spot for the straightforward pop of the late sixties and seventies, music that didn't hit you over the head with how skillfully it was assembled, trusting that you'd appreciate its rich, understated textures on your own.

The multi-talented Wilkins has just released his first full album and the contents, including the biting "The Back of My Head" and the poignant groove of "Soup for One," should appeal to anyone in the market for smart, sharply produced pop.

DM



December 5, 2011

## Swapping Notes with Ben Wilkins

We sat down with Montreal based musician Ben Wilkins to find out who his musical influences are, his favourite track on his album, and where he sees himself in five years.

By Giselle San Miguel



### **Describe your musical background.**

I grew up singing constantly, and my parents put me in piano lessons when I was five. I listened to the Beatles a lot on my parents record player and learned to sing everything. At eleven I learned how to play the guitar and the trumpet and began playing in bands at school. Eventually it was my favourite thing to do, and I moved to Montreal to study music at McGill University. I learned a lot about arranging and music theory, but my favourite thing to do was write songs and record them – something that wasn't part of the curriculum. After school I kept writing and performing and made an album.

**Who are your musical influences and why?**

I listen to everything but I'm influenced by a lot of music from the 1970's or older. There's a romantic quality to those songs that are beautiful and sincere. Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Burt Bacharach, and Paul Simon. Those people make me crazy in all the right ways.

**What kind of advice would you give to aspiring artists?**

I'd say if you love what you do, keep developing and keep at it. It takes a lot of patience and self-sacrifice to make it. But hard work, perseverance and a bit of talent will always rise to the top. I'm an optimist and have thought that way for years. Not because I don't have moments of despair, but because I get better results by being positive.

**Which track is your favourite on your self-titled debut album?**

That's a tough question. My songs are like children. I love them all differently and can't pick a favourite, but I will anyway. Soup for One came out really well, and it's always fun to play live.

**Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**

In five years I'd like to have at least two more albums out, and maybe do more collaborating with other artists. I can also see myself with a little studio on a farm somewhere. I've been living in cities now for a while and I dream of moving to the country.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

Aside from all things music, I enjoy people, cooking, spicy food, the outdoors, exercising, water sports, surfing when I can get near the ocean, conversations that go too late, and too many other things to continue listing.

**About Ben Wilkins**

Ben Wilkins was born and raised in Ontario, and moved to Montreal, Quebec at the age of eighteen to study music at McGill University. He majored in Classical Trumpet and soaked up whatever he could regarding composition, arranging, singing, theory and jazz harmony – spending countless nights sneaking into the piano studios afterhours to write songs.

Ben Wilkin's self-titled debut album on Milagro Records is in stores across Canada.





December 2011 - Toronto

## Ben Wilkins, "Self-Titled"

Milagro Records

*Reviewed by Vee Manzerolle*



The self-titled full-length debut album from Ben Wilkins provides music inspiration with its numerous orchestrated arrangements. Born and raised in Ontario Wilkins decided to pursue an education in music at McGill University before a music career. His studies focused on Classical Trumpet with the addition of composition, arranging, singing, music theory, and jazz harmony. Listening to his debut album it's apparent that school most definitely paid off. From the album's first track "Opening" an arrangement of various instruments is immediately introduced. Wilkins' soothing voice compliments the sound of violin, piano, and soft drums. The song ends with a triumphant brass conclusion. You'll get a nostalgic feeling when listening to Ben Wilkins; "Soup for One" plays on that feeling. Wilkins' vocals share a similar sound with the acclaimed artist Jamiroquai while maintaining a unique signature sound of his own. As a listener you get the vibe that he would put on a flawless live performance. Wilkins shows his versatility with "Back of my Head." The track is more aggressive and powerful than previous tracks on the album. It still taps into an orchestrated pop sound with the dynamic of fast and aggressive versus slow and soft. An abrupt end with piano adds a nice touch. Ben Wilkins could easily be deemed a modern day crooner. The tracks found on his self-titled debut album back his vocals with an orchestra or big band resonance. If you had to classify this album the most appropriate title would be orchestrated pop music. Ben Wilkins focuses on the beauty of instruments and their mechanics. **3.5/5**

**The Anti-Hit List for Nov. 26**

By John Sakamoto  
Staff Reporter

## The Anti-Hit List



Ontario-born Ben Wilkins brings jazz and the sounds of the '70s to his broad musical palette.

### 5. BEN WILKINS

#### “Back of My Head”

Because this Ontario-born, Montreal-based musician sings and plays the piano, it's instinctive to reach for the Ben Folds or Rufus Wainwright comparisons. Yet there's a jazz and '70s-soul dimension to this single that isn't typically part of those artists' musical palettes. With the help of Pascal Shefteshy (best known for his engineering work for Sarah McLachlan) and a background that includes McGill University and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Wilkins has an intriguing tendency to veer off on a detour and make them sound he intended to take that route all along.



## Canadian Music Video Shout Out! – Ben Wilkins!

By J MacDonald | Published November 24, 2011



### Ben Wilkins everybody!

Born and raised in Ontario, Wilkins moved to Montreal to study music at McGill University. He majored in Classical Trumpet and soaked up as much composition, arranging, singing, theory and jazz harmony as possible, spending countless nights sneaking into the piano studios after hours to write songs. Upon graduation, he received a scholarship to study Mandarin in China, and spent the better part of a year at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Beijing Language and Culture University.

Ben oozes musical style and talent, and this video celebrates his hard work and achievements in a classy way. Big sounds, great vocals, superb artistic vision, this is so much great stuff packed into a wonderfully thought out music video.

Do yourself a favor and go to the link above to see Ben's website, which plays the music video in the browser as it loads the page! Very cool stuff, and a very solid presentation on top of his talented tunes.



## Interview

By Jesse Skinner  
November 18, 2011

# BEN WILKINS



I've used the music of Montreal's **Ben Wilkins** to cheer myself up, but it's more than just comfort food. It's finely crafted pop music of the highest calibre, part throwback to the days of Harry Nilsson, Billy Joel and Randy Newman, part modern indie rock drained of brooding and self-obsession.

Before his appearance at this year's **M for Montreal** festival, I spoke with Wilkins about how to make an artistic living in the city, his choice to be a nominally solo artist, and the curious characteristics of his chosen instrument.

### **Is it easy to live the life on an artist in Montreal?**

There's low overhead, so a lot of people are here creating art. Some stand out more than others, obviously the indie rock movement with Montreal bands who have made a mark internationally.

### **Have you found yourself fitting into artistic groups on a social level, not even just fellow musicians?**

Not really. At one point I thought it would be like Paris at the turn of the century, I'd find and hang out with songwriting contemporaries, like Fitzgerald (socializing) with Hemingway. But what I look for in a friend is very different than what I look for in someone to work with. In my personal life I try not to take myself very seriously and that doesn't mesh with a lot of other singer/songwriters. You're supposed to show up and be mysterious and broody. I don't feel like a performer when I walk around, I don't put on this air of artistic mystery. There's plenty of that in town (already.)

### **How did you draw in collaborators?**

It's a delicate thing. The project/band I have with seven people is called "Ben Wilkins." It's me because I write the songs but live it's a very different thing. Someone told me when I moved to Montreal that if you want to make it you have to approach it as though no one will be there. As if you're really the leader, and if you do that collaborators will come to you much more quickly because people look for that leadership. That's essentially what's happened with me. I don't take the leadership role aggressively, I'm always looking for input, but I'm aware of my position and I try not to shy away from that. I try to be the leader I'd want to work for.

### **In that position though you must have to turn down other people's suggestions, maybe constantly?**

At this point I'm working with people who are happy to suggest things and are happy if I trump them with another interpretation. If someone makes a suggestion that goes against the integrity of the song, that's a pretty strong vote. But everyone has their own set of ears. My drummer or bass player will redo their bits if they feel they're off or not tight enough. And that's good: without that my band would just feel like a bunch of hired guns who do what I say. That would make for some lifeless music.

### **Do you write in collaboration?**

Mostly solo. I've dabbled in collaborative writing a little bit. I'm definitely open to it and I'd love to do it more but for now I go into my own practice space and do my own thing.

**I imagine that would be a greater challenge on piano. It's not a relatively loud instrument but the sound of it can really dominate a room.**

Yeah. There's clarity in the instrument; when you play more dense harmony, jazz chords and things, it really resonates in the human ear. With jazz chords played on the piano versus the guitar ... you can "sing" all the notes on piano while the texture of the guitar is muddier. So when I'm writing on the piano I have to be much surer of the decisions I'm making. This is cool because I have to be sold on an idea before I move on. That gives you a natural confidence when you play.

**What does the piano require of you physically?**

You're seated, right, so leading the band from a chair is a unique thing. It's easier to be charismatic when you're standing up with a guitar. You can move around, work the room. I'm always sideways to the audience which is a bit of a disadvantage, but at the same time it allows me to be a part of the band. Physically, piano is all in your shoulders, I guess. Your wrists have to be really light but you need the connection all the way from your shoulders to the hammering of your fingers. That has to work smoothly.

**I can't imagine the logistical nightmare of having to tour with a piano.**

A lot of pianists don't have the luxury of getting to know an instrument very well. If you tour and play jazz clubs you just have to play the instrument they have there. But I move my piano to each gig. This year I bought one specifically for touring and I've gotten to know it well. But up until that point I pretty much had to find them wherever I could. I had to adapt. Some pianos sound very moody and mellow and others sound much thicker. Some just sing like crazy. The one I have now is very clear and bright.

**Do you play when prompted, outside of the stage?**

Depends how I'm feeling. I don't really like that kind of thing. When you tell people you're a singer they'll say "Oh, sing something for me!" "Right now? We're on the bus." It's tricky. You'll be at a family reunion and someone will ask you to play a song ... I want to say, like, "Well, you're an accountant. Why don't you do my taxes?"





## Ben Wilkins ★★★★★



### Disc review

By Kevin Laforest – November 17, 2011

Right from the get-go, Ben Wilkins grabs our attention on this sublime debut LP which showcases a sophisticated, timeless brand of pop. Built around his singing and piano playing, the Montrealer's songs later expand to include lavish string and brass arrangements. Sometimes reminiscent of the work of Elton John, Ben Folds or Scissor Sisters, Ben Wilkins' music warmly grooves along, soars into dreamy soundscapes and sneaks into your heart. In possession of an acute sense of melody, Wilkins consistently impresses throughout this impeccable sounding album, which he co-produced with Pascal Shefteshy at Studio PM. Truly exceptional.

## Praise for a bigger sound

Monday, November 14, 2011

by Madison Foster



**Ben Wilkins' new self-titled record has a big sound sure to hook big audiences everywhere.**

The first time I sat down and listened to Ben Wilkins' self-titled album, the first thing I thought to myself was, "Great, another Ben Folds sound-alike. Just what the music world needs." But as I made my way through the album and even the first track, I changed my mind quickly. Although Wilkins does have a voice that could easily be compared to Ben Folds, he is backed by a rich and full instrumental sound that makes the music unique in his own way.

The London, Ontario-born singer/songwriter, whose debut album hit record stores on October 18, has already heard a great amount of praise for his advanced music ability, voice and pop-driven piano melodies. All of these fall into place when listening to tracks such as "Back Of My Head", with its powerful breakdowns of harmonizing piano and strings, and "Chameleon", a vocal-driven jazz influenced number, which I believe to be the stand-out track on the album. It's no surprise that the strong piano sound that plays backup to Wilkins' powerful tenor comes from 13 pianos that were recorded in unison with 24 musicians to create an orchestra of sounds that includes strings, brass, percussion, winds and a small choir.

A genuine music lover, Wilkins left London at the age of 18 to study Classical Trumpet at McGill University in Montreal. It was there that he was able to soak up as much composition, arranging, singing, theory and jazz harmony as possible. After graduation, he received a scholarship to study Mandarin in China, where he spent the better part of the year at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. It was after his return to Montreal that Wilkins was approached by acclaimed engineer Pascal Shefteshy (who has in the past worked with musicians such as Sarah McLachlan and Rufus Wainwright) to record an album. The finished result was fittingly described as "an ageless and enduring classic pop record" by the Morburn Music blog.

Thanks to the positive and rave reviews that have become known in the few weeks since the release of the self-titled album, it will be no surprise for Ben Wilkins to move forward into the spotlight with this debut album, with its rich and warm melodies that will be admired by fans well into future projects by the artist. Released with Milagro Records, the self titled album by Ben Wilkins is available in record stores now. For more information, check out [benwilkinsmusic.com](http://benwilkinsmusic.com).



## Review- “Ben Wilkins”- Ben Wilkins

Posted on November 9, 2011 by Michael Thomas



Sometimes the 70's can be celebrated for more than just disco tunes, as is the case with the debut LP from Montreal singer-songwriter Ben Wilkins.

Wilkins' sound is one that isn't heard as often in modern music- he plays piano and is accompanied by strings and percussion. It immediately brings back images from the 70's but thankfully this LP isn't cheesy.

If anything, this LP is really, really cheerful. Even the slower and more heartfelt songs aren't wallowing in sadness; the combination of the keys and the strings makes for easy listening. Think of *Ben Wilkins* as a soundtrack to a cold Sunday afternoon spent sipping red wine and reading a good book.

On occasion the cheerfulness of the album can be a little too much. The one example is in the song “Caught in the Rain” when Wilkins mentions a line about being hit by a car. Accompanied by the gentle music it almost sounds like that was a good thing that happened to him.

The way Wilkins frames his songs is interesting to look at as well. For instance, “Through to You” is written like a letter to a lost friend- or perhaps even a lost love. It begins with the simple yet uncommon first lyrics: “Thank you for the stew/You’ve always been a friend and complementary/A provider of sorts.”

Another interesting frame is the song “Allison” that is sung like any song but is completely in the form of a story about the title character as she’s first sitting on a chair and sipping a drink before going off to a river. A song like this could be really lame but Wilkins makes it rather effortless.

Control is a big element in the album’s music. The piano and strings always work in a balance, one not overpowering the other. In the album opener (fittingly called “Opening”) the strings and keys combine to create a frantic atmosphere while “Back Of My Head” wavers between intensity and softness at the drop of a hat. Wilkins clearly knew what he was doing here.

If I had one criticism it would be that towards the end the songs become a little repetitive. I’m not quite sure how this could be remedied, though; I don’t think Wilkins needs to necessarily experiment with new mixtures of sound. The sound he currently has seems to work for him. It will be interesting to see what he comes out with next, no doubt.

**Top Tracks:** “Back Of My Head”; “Allison”

**Rating: Strong Hoot** (Good)

# Musician adds a dash of pop

## Ben Wilkins

By Chris Montanini  
November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011



When singer/songwriter Ben Wilkins moved from London to Montreal, Que. where he studied classical trumpet at McGill University, the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic secondary school graduate was looking for a change in scenery.

"I wanted to move to a University that was going to have a great music program," Wilkins said. "But also I wanted to live in an environment that was as much like a foreign country as I could get."

After picking up French during his studies, Wilkins took it a step farther, moving to China after graduating and spending time at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and then the Beijing Language and Culture University.

"I wanted to try something harder so I kind of picked China for a few different reasons, but it was pretty close to choosing a name out of a hat," Wilkins said.

But something was missing during his foray into Asia.

"It's different," Wilkins said. "People there don't really know the Beatles, they don't know a lot of the classic bands and songwriters that changed the musical landscape in this part of the world."

Now back in Montreal, it seems Wilkins has embraced that classic sound on his debut self-titled CD, a meticulously arranged, piano-driven 10-track album that touches his penchant for classical music but also his ear for pop.

Wilkins' big break, he said, was getting extra time in Canadian producer Pierre Marchand's studio when Marchand (known for recording Sarah McLachlan, among others) left the country, leaving Wilkins to the studio with engineer Pascal Shefteshy.

"All of a sudden I could work every day in a studio that would normally cost thousands of dollars a day," Wilkins said. "That's pretty remarkable."

Wilkins took advantage of the opportunity, not only experimenting with his own tenor vocals and piano but arranging a variety of strings, brass, winds, percussion and a small choir.

"I consciously wanted a record that sounded a little different than the way a lot of records are coming out now," Wilkins said. "I wanted it to be much more traditional in that, I wanted it to breathe a lot, I wanted warm sounds, I didn't want to worry about the initial punch. I wanted to hook people slowly."

There are 24 musicians recorded on the album, the elements of which combine for a kind of pop that's at times a bit retro.

"I like the way records that were made in those years, '69 to '76, there was something about the way they were using tape and the kind of microphones they had, they found this happy middle ground between low-fi older recordings and what became the eighties sound," Wilkins said. "I'm really happy with the sound, aesthetically."

Wilkins is now travelling with six band members — piano, bass, drums and a string quartet — and although he said they're aren't any London concert dates confirmed yet, Ontario dates are expected to be announced in the spring.





## **Ben Wilkins - The Drake Underground, Toronto - Saturday, October 29th, 2011**



*By Vanessa Markov*

Ben Wilkins is an old soul with a knack for composing catchy and emotionally charged, piano-driven pop layered with breezy string arrangements fit for black and white dream sequences. Employing a total of 24 musicians its creation, the 27 year old Ontario native (now based in Montreal) released his self-titled debut LP on October 18, and I haven't stopped listening to it since.

Ben performed at The Drake Underground last Halloween weekend with a more modest-sized band of 7, which consists of himself on piano (and when I say piano, I don't mean keyboard. I mean piano. Ben's piano, which I learned he takes everywhere), William Côté on drums and xylophone, Alexandre Lefaiivre on bass, and Véronica Ungureanu, Kerry Smith, Maria Demacheva, and Gaël Lavigne on strings – possibly the prettiest string quartet in the business. Smart move, Ben, you sly dog.

As for Ben himself, he looks like he walked straight out of the 70s with his long curly hair, baby face, button down shirt, and flared jeans, and is as easy on the eyes as his wistful, jazz-tinged tenor vocals are on the ears. He's pretty much exactly the guy who girls imagine would show up at their bedroom window for a moonlight serenade.

But not every song is about "blooming flowers, fresh fruit, and red wine". Ben draws inspiration from difficult emotional experiences as well, such as in *Out the Window*, a new song about a true story with lyrics so touching, I had to share some with you:

"You're a brilliant one and the road you walk/Has the perfect point of view.../Well the sun comes up and it's all so new/And they've taken you away/The way you talk and the things you say/Have the doctors watching you.../Then I see you staring out the window/As the day fades away/And you look right into my worry/And you ask me, 'Will you stay?'"

Ben performed for just over an hour, showcasing most of his album along with new songs he is still working on, stopping a few times to talk about the inspiration or writing process behind a song. "I originally wrote this song on piano," he says about the song *Allison* as he tunes his ukulele. "But I wanted a more nostalgic feel, so I tried a ukulele and it worked." It sure did. Everything worked.

There isn't a single aspect of Ben's young career that falls short of outstanding, from his ability to combine components of modern pop with classical elements as if they were made for each other, to his romanticized interpretations of the simplest things in life, to the magical way in which his music can reconcile broken spirits while simultaneously evoking tears.

Heck, even his website is an intricate feat of creativity.





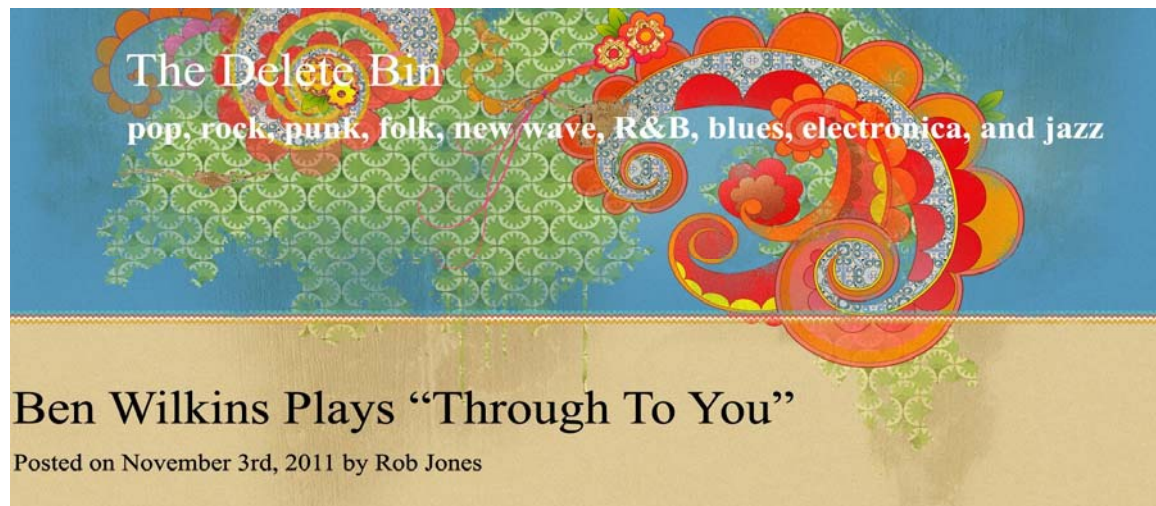
November 4th, 2011

## Ben Wilkins Debuts by Two Scoops



I've been hitting up Canada's Ben Wilkins for more songs ever since the 'Back of My Head' EP. Finally the new self titled debut album is out and you can it [here](#) right now. Thanks to Ben, I've been listening to the album over and over. Definitely one of those albums where each song holds its own and you don't have to hit the skip. Track to track, Ben's flexes mad piano jams with lots of instruments all over. The EP tracks are all on the new album but some of the arrangements have changed. Gotta have both but loved the new twists. Get that album now and if you're in Canada, support him on his release tour!





Here's a clip of Burt-Bacharach-Brian-Wilson-Carole-King-Todd-Rundgren classic pop inheritor, and singer-songwriter from Montreal Ben Wilkins. It's the video for his new single "Through To You" a tune featured on last year's *Back Of My Head* EP, and now a shining gem on a full-length debut record of gems, 2011's *Ben Wilkins*.



Formally trained in music at Montreal's McGill University, and the Shainghai Conservatory of Music, Wilkins built up his skills in playing music for the sheer fun of it by developing a solid base of composition, singing, harmonic theory, and some arranger's chops into the mix. A love of AM radio singles of decades past endured all the while. As a result, his approach to arranging and recording involves a seriously sumptuous and lushly-realized sound that pulls from orchestral pop traditions which gelled and became immortal at the end of the '60s. But, here we're reminded that just because a sound is closely associated with an era, it doesn't mean it's stuck there. As such, what we've got here is the kind of thoroughly enjoyable contemporary pop record that we're always complaining never gets made anymore. The decade in which it was made doesn't really matter.

This is classic pop.

After receiving a preview copy of the record, I spoke with Ben via email about the making of this song, the video, the album, about the spirit of classic pop, and the elusive idea that music may or may not be the universal language.

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**The Delete Bin:** *With a song like "Through To You", and on other songs on the record, a lot of thought was put into the business of arrangement. How has being your own arranger, and having a solid background in that area freed you up during the recording process?*

**Ben Wilkins:** It's definitely given me more control. I didn't have to hand my songs off and see what happens and I was able to use my imagination right through to the end of recording. Arranging and songwriting are different things but they sometimes come at the same time. I sometimes hear the arrangement of a song before it's finished writing. I'm still learning a lot about both.

**DB:** *You've made an incredibly warm record, with lush strings, woodwinds, brass, vibes, piano (of course) and even a small choir that really bring the songs to life. In an age of 'Garage Band' and other admittedly useful tools for many, do you feel that your approach to traditional arranging and recording is becoming a lost art where independently made pop music is concerned?*

**BW:** Anybody can make a record these days, and that's a good thing. Unfortunately many of them, including releases by the major labels, sound harsh and squashed. Many labels think if the album is louder, people will notice it more.

My Engineer/co-producer Pascal Shefteshy and I consciously did it differently – avoiding many production methods that have become conventional. Ironically, this caused the orchestral instruments to pop out more and the whole album to be more dynamic.

**DB:** *Let's talk a bit about the video for "Through To You". What was it like being involved in making it?*

**BW:** That was a hilarious experience. I had to sing in slow motion to the song that was playing three times slower than normal, then the footage was sped back up to normal speed. If I sneezed, or blinked, or made any jerky motion it looked strange once sped up, so I had to practice for a couple days.



**DB:** *To me, the video communicates a man out of time, or perhaps out of step with what's going on around him. How does this relate to where you are in relation to local music scenes in Montreal?*

**BW:** The video was shot in the cafe where I used to do a weekly show. They have six hours of live music a day, and lots of it isn't indie rock. Montreal is a great place to develop and make music. You don't have to sound like the signature Montreal bands to benefit from the enormous talent pool.

Having said that, indie rock dominates the local scene and I don't fit into that. For that I do get some flack, but I'm OK being a bit of an odd duck. It probably helps solidify what I'm doing.

**DB:** *In addition to writing and recording your own work, you've also been involved in the work of other artists, particularly as an arranger (Bran Van 3000, Misstress Barbara). What's your primary motivation for keeping your hand in creative processes which are driven by another artist, or group?*

**BW:** Collaborating is always an interesting learning experience. I find when I get in on someone else's creative process it opens up new perspectives and I inevitably learn more about my own. And honestly it's a welcomed change when someone else has the reins and responsibility and I can just show up, do my thing and walk away.

**DB:** *You've mentioned elsewhere (and I agree) that there is something special about that late '60s and early '70s orchestral pop sound from which your music draws. I've talked to other artists who say the same, and they all suggest that the sound seems to build the melancholia and the nostalgia right into it. When you approached your album, what was it that kept things on track to bring your songs in line with that same spirit?*

**BW:** I pretty much kept the production process in line with that same spirit as records made back then. More rehearsals with the band before recording and less need for editing after. Most of the songs on the record were recorded with no click track. There are moments, the chorus of "Soup For One" for example, where the tempo changes on purpose. It's pretty impossible to achieve naturally if you're working to a grid.

Whenever it made sense, I had recording sessions with groups of musicians, so the string parts were recorded by a quartet playing their parts together. Same thing for the brass. It's harder to make a record like that, because you lose some of your post-production safety net, but we were heavily rehearsed and willing to take the risk.

**DB:** *You spent some time studying music in China. What were some of your most important takeaways as a musician, taken out of your usual cultural context?*

**BW:** I learned in China that music is not necessarily a universal language. It's very cultural and its ability to affect you is related to your individual reference point. If you've never heard Chinese opera, you may have a tough time feeling anything on your first few listens.

Some of the people I played music for had never heard The Beatles, and when I played them music I was working on they said "I listen but I don't understand what to feel". It's all part of the beauty of music. It's a big ocean and there are many places to drop an anchor.

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Thanks, Ben!

For more information about tours, and other stuff, check out the Ben Wilkins site. The debut album, just released on October 18, is on Milagro Records.

Enjoy!





## Video: BEN WILKINS – Through To You

28 October 2011



*Ben Wilkins* recently came up on our radar and boy are we glad he did – his brand of piano driven pop is nothing if not catchy. Now's your chance to hear what we're talking about; check out *Through To You* in the video below.

The Toronto release party for the album goes down on October 29th at The Drake Underground – be sure to get out and show your support. For additional live dates and more info, visit *Ben Wilkins* over on Facebook.

## Dangerous and delicious...

Publié le 21 Octobre 2011

Toula's Take

Montreal is an ever pulsating nerve centre of culture and all things decadent and dreamy; whether we're talking food, music, fashion, or art. We may have bridges and overpasses collapsing around us and corruption inquiries underway, but we just keep on dancing.

It's strange that our city motto is Concordia Salus (Well Being in Harmony), because, let's face it... that's borderline boring. Maybe we should have adopted "We're fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance" (Japanese proverb) since it suits this city's temperament so much better. Guess that was too long.

### **Ben Wilkins' star about to shine**

Early this week Montreal musician Ben Wilkins launched his self-titled CD and I have been listening to it non-stop. It's even playing while I'm writing this column. His piano-powered arrangements, which often feature string quartets, bass and drums are reminiscent of a sweet romantic late '60s and '70s vibe. Wilkins, who studied jazz and classical music at McGill, pays an indirect tribute to the saccharine sounds of Burt Bacharach, but has a voice that is really all his own. *Soup For One* and *Through To You* are my personal favourites. I predict big things for this hometown boy.

<http://benwilkinsmusic.com/>



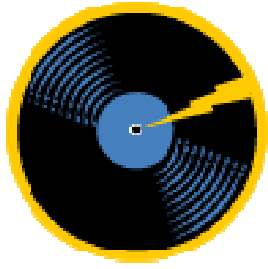


2011, Nova Scotia, Canada, Ketch Harbour

# Ben Wilkins



Ben Wilkins – Residing in Montreal, this classically trained, multi-instrumentalist is fixing to release his debut, self-titled and the amount of polish he brings to intricately arranged piano jams is impressive. The touch points aren't shocking – you can hear some *Jamiroquai* and *Ben Folds* in the mix- but the combination of strings, horns and piano with his soulful voice works well and the arrangements hint that this strong debut is simply the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Plus, he's got quite a solid white guy, type fro going which is always enjoyable in my humble.



Le meilleur de la  
musique

January 2011

## BEN WILKINS

BACK OF MY HEAD EP



Most people know Ben Folds as a sort of goofy troubadour (or one of the hosts of *The Sing Off*), mixing a certain brand of irreverence into his piano-driven pop/rock. And while that's true, Folds' best work has never really been his humorous songs – at least to me. His best songs are the ones that are honest about relationships and life. There's a reason that "Smoke" was included in Nick Hornby's *Songbook* and "Steven's Last Night In Town" was not.

All this talk about Ben Folds is with good reason, because Canadian artist **Ben Wilkins** sounds almost exactly like him. There are times when listening to his recent EP – *Back of My Head* – that I would have sworn that he had channeled Ben Folds himself. This EP, if you're a fan of Folds' work, is a must have. Wilkins is an excellent songwriter in his own respect, and his jazzy, free takes on his songs are refreshing as well. Think of him as a new member of The Bens, and he kind of looks like Ben Lee.



December 26, 2010

## Ben Wilkins: Piano Pop, Beautifully Arranged

By Guy Raz

A musician from Montreal, Ben Wilkins plays piano-powered alternative pop that recalls Ben Folds and Rufus Wainwright. It's a different sound for a city that has more recently embraced dramatic indie rock like that of Arcade Fire and Patrick Watson.

"I guess I don't really fit into that world," Wilkins tells *Weekend All Things Considered* host Guy Raz. "It's always quite challenging, when we're doing a show, to find someone to play with. I didn't really mean to completely stand out or be an oddity. I was just writing songs that were true to what I wanted to do and the music I like to listen to."

Wilkins says he listens to Burt Bacharach, Brian Wilson and Milton Nascimento, among others. "I continue to go back to recordings made in the late 1960s and '70s for the warmth," Wilkins says. "There's a romance in that music that doesn't seem to die."

Unlike many singer-songwriters, Wilkins studied jazz and classical music at McGill College. "Going to music school is a difficult thing," he says. "I remember people warning me about it before I got there. 'You love music, you love playing music. Are you sure you want to go to music school?'... But I was able to use the degree and the experience there to learn a lot more about harmony and arranging."

It's Wilkins' knack for arrangements that stands out on his debut EP, *Back of My Head*, which features string quartets alongside piano, bass and drums. He recorded it at the studio of Sarah McLachlan producer Pierre Marchand, with the help of 24 other musicians.

"I wrote all the arrangements myself," Wilkins says. "As I got more comfortable incorporating orchestral instruments into my live show and recordings, the arranging started to become part of the songwriting. Sometimes, when I'm writing a song, I can already hear what the strings or brass is going to do."

One song that's getting attention is the EP's title track. The video features Wilkins playing the piano in a cafe, surrounded by people moving around in fast forward. "The concept was from [directors] Xuan Pham and Adrien Le Grand," Wilkins says. "The way we actually did it was very difficult, and required a lot of practice. I was actually playing the song and singing along three times slower, and the whole video was sped up afterward."

## ***Blog: ThisBonusTrack.com***

### **Ben Wilkins: Through to You**

By Jay. Posted on December 23, 2010.



The other day I came across an artist by the name of **Ben Wilkins**.

If you don't know him, just wait, you will. As a product of Ontario (represent), Wilkins moved to Montreal at the age of eighteen for music studies at McGill University.

While majoring in the Classic Trumpet in university, it is evident that his musical capabilities spread far beyond the instrument.

Did I mention that besides being incredibly musically inclined, he has a set of pipes on him that may just blow you out of the water? To be honest it was the music video for his song, **Through to You** that really blew me away.

I don't want to ruin it for you, as I truly believe it'll turn you on to the artist, but it basically features Wilkins playing the piano as the world grooves by to his pace.

So I'd urge you to check out his website and purchase his new EP, *Back of my Head* from iTunes; it's off the wall.





November 29, 2010

## BEN WILKINS

BACK OF MY HEAD EP



With the scent of fresh paint in the air after a brand new launch of, well, just about everything, it seems we may have a brilliant newcomer to the Canadian pop music scene. Ontario-raised and Montreal-residing **Ben Wilkins** released his new EP, "*Back Of My Head*" just last week to an unsuspecting global online audience.

While Wilkins brings a certain degree of familiarity in this piano-based pop delight, there is something a bit more distinct and unusual about his music that has really drawn us in. It may be the comprehensive use of strings and horns, the quirky lyrics, the doubled up vocals, or the cinematic song structure (could easily fit into the '*I Heart Huckabees*' soundtrack), but one thing is certain: **Ben Wilkins** makes you feel good. Really, really good.

A song that incorporates Wilkins' minty fresh vocals with intricately arranged strings, brass, winds, and orchestral percussion, "*Through To You*" captures the best elements of multiple genres and puts them in a warm melting pot of delicious treats. The video (also doubling as the splash page to his website), does a wonderful job of capturing your attention, while keeping things simple in a single room with a stationary camera.

We have fallen in love with Montreal over the past year ourselves, so when Ben Wilkins was brought to our attention via one of our Canadian friends, we had to take a listen. Oh Canada, how jealous we are of your beautifully cohesive and collaborative music scene!